

# Hazardous mail risk assessment: Explanatory information



This information is to be read in conjunction with the *Dealing with suspicious and hazardous mail for frontline staff: A process for responding to explosive, biological, chemical or radiological contaminants, sharps and dangerous items, and offensive letters and parcels.*

Electronic copies can be downloaded at no cost from [www.homelandsecurity.org.au/publications](http://www.homelandsecurity.org.au/publications)

## Purpose

This assessment process is designed for frontline staff to be used for all categories of hazardous mail which consists of:

- Biological and chemical substances, including powdery, granular or sand like solids, gases or liquids.
- Sharps and dangerous items, including razor blades and needles.
- Offensive mail, including death threats, grossly objectionable matters, racial vilification and rant letters.

## ***How to assess possible hazardous mail***

You need to carry out a risk assessment to determine if the mail item is suspicious. The risk assessment involves answering the three questions below. If the answer is yes to any of these questions, you may consider the mail is suspect and warrants further attention.

### **Question 1 Does the item have one or more hazardous mail indicators?<sup>4</sup>**

A suspect item may have several hazardous mail indicators but you need to be aware that it may also have none. There are three categories of hazardous mail indicators.<sup>1</sup>

#### ***i. Emissions and releases from the item***

- Powdery, granular or sand like substances visible on the outside or leaking from it
- Ticking or unusual sound
- Unusual odour
- Sparks, fumes, clouds or smoke
- Oily stains or discolourations
- Causes skin irritation when touched
- Melts or alters the surfaces it touches

#### ***ii. Strange labelling, postage and markings on the item***

- Address handwritten or poorly typed
- Misspellings of common words
- Not addressed to a specific person but to a position title
- Incorrect position title
- Strange return address or no return address
- Postmarked from a city or state that does not match the return address
- Excessive postage stamps
- Marked with warnings, threatening language, signs and restrictions such as *Confidential*, *Dangerous ideas inside*, *Do not x-ray* and an image of the skull and crossbones

**iii. Unusual shape and form of the item**

- Strange shape or weight
- Lopsided or unevenly weighted envelope
- Stiff or rigid envelope
- Powdery, granular or sand like substances felt through the envelope/package
- Razor blades, bullets or other dangerous items felt through the envelope/package
- Excessive weight
- Protruding wires, tin foil and sharps (needles)
- Excessive security materials, such as masking tape and string

**Question 2 Does the item have characteristics which are not typical of normal mail received?**

You need to determine what is typical of the mail you receive. To do this, you need to consider the mail you have received over the preceding months and identify:

- Who are the typical senders?
- What is typical labelling, postage and markings on the items you receive?
- What is the usual shape and form of the items you receive?

**Question 3 Was it delivered in a non-typical way?**

You need to determine how mail is typically delivered. To do this, you need to consider the mail you receive over the preceding months and identify:

- What types of mail are delivered by post, couriers and by hand?
- Is there some mail which is delivered in unusual ways and how often does this occur? (For example, samples of products which come from overseas once every six months or legal documents delivered by hand to the Legal Officer whenever a board election is to occur.)